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Village elites in the early Roman Arsinoite*

1. Introduction

In the last three decades the definition of elites in the ancient world has attracted much scholarly attention, and several recent studies have attempted to identify the main features of this social category in particular times and regions[1].The most common definition of 'elite', as theorised by Pareto, includes a distinction between ruling and non-ruling groups[2]. The first refers to a limited number of individuals who play a key role in the government's decision-making. The composition of the non-ruling elite, on the other hand, varies depending upon the criteria which are used to define it, namely wealth,

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[1] Theories on the nature of the elites have been proposed for the first time by V. Pareto, *The mind and society* (4 vols.), London 1935 (English transl. of *Trattato di sociologia generale*, 1915-19) and G. Mosca, *The ruling class*, New York 1939. Examples of studies on ancient elites are J. Ober, *Mass and elite in democratic Athens: rhetoric, ideology, and the power of the people*, Princeton 1989, L. Tacoma, *Fragile hierarchies. The urban elites of third-century Roman Egypt*, Leiden 2006, and N. Fischer and H. van Wees, *'Aristocracy' in antiquity: redefining Greek and Roman elite*, Swansea 2015. Cf. also the volume by M. Cébeillac-Gervasoni - L. Lamoine (eds.), *Les élites et leurs facettes. Les élites locales dans le monde hellénistique et romain*, Rome 2003.

[2] Pareto, *The mind and society* cit., pp. 1423-24.

high level of education, and privileges associated with aristocratic origin[3].

The term 'elite' is commonly found in studies of the ancient world, applied to various privileged social groups, which do not necessarily have the exact same set of characteristics.

The early Principate saw the emergence of a powerful elite, which played a fundamental role in the process of 'Romanisation' of Italy and the provinces[4]. In the western provinces the local elites were the members of town councils (*decuriones* or *curiales*), who, by holding administrative and civic positions, provided their communities with self-administrative institutions[5]. In the eastern provinces, where the city-state institutions were left in place, the local 'elites' are usually taken to have included members of the various local governments, both members of the city councils (*bouleutai*) or simply high civic officials[6].

It emerges clearly that for both the eastern and the western provinces the term 'elite' has been used in the political sense of ruling group. But there were also other types of elites, distinguished groups with no (or very limited) political character. These were the social and economic elites, made up of particularly affluent individuals who also enjoyed a marked social prestige. This varied set-up in the higher levels of society becomes apparent when looking at the Roman province of Egypt, where the model of local elites, as it was attested in the other eastern provinces, is not so easily applicable, especially in the first two centuries AD. Here we find a diversified administrative establishment which included only the three, then, from AD 130, four, Greek cities (*poleis*),

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[3] V. Pareto, *Les systèmes socialistes*, Paris 1902, p. 28; Ober, op. cit., p. 11.

[4] The relevant bibliography is huge. See, more recently, G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman. The origins of provincial civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge 1998; P. Leroux, *La romanisation en question*, «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales» LIX (2004), pp. 287-311; G. Alföldy, *Romanisation - Grundbegriff oder Fehlgriff? Überlegungen zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Erforschung von Integrationsprozessen im römischen Weltreich*, in Z. Visy (ed.), «*Limes XIX*», Pécs 2005, pp. 25-56.

[5] See, for examples, J. Edmondson, *Cities and urban life in the Western provinces of the Roman empire, 30 BCE-250 CE*, in D. S. Potter (ed.), «*A companion to the Roman empire*», Oxford 2006, pp. 250-280, and H. Mouritsen, *Local elites in Italy and the Western provinces*, in C. Bruun - J. Edmondson (eds.), «*The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*», Oxford 2015, pp. 225-49.

[6] C. Schuler, *Local elites in the Greek East*, in «*The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*», 2015, pp. 250-273. In general, on the cities of the Roman East see A. H. M. Jones, *The cities of the Eastern Roman provinces*, Oxford 1971 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1937).

that is Alexandria, Naukratis, Ptolemais in Upper Egypt, and Antinooupolis; forty-two nome capitals (metropoleis), and thousands of villages[7].

A peculiar feature of Roman Egypt is the lack of city councils (*boulai*) in cities (with the exception of Ptolemais) and metropoleis until AD 200, when, under Septimius Severus, they were officially granted[8].

Even Alexandria, the capital of Egypt and one of the most important commercial and cultural centres in the Mediterranean, which had a Greek population arranged in demes, had civic magistracies, but crucially no city councils[9].

The lack of *boulai*, however, did not mean for Egypt a lack of self-administration or of an urban elite. As argued by Bowman and Rathbone, the evidence seems to show that local magistrates and other officials had provided their communities with a certain level of civic independence since the early years of the Roman domination in the province[10].

Such officials were most likely recruited from the wealthiest echelons of the gymnasial group, a privileged urban category, attested in *poleis* as well as in metropoleis, made up of individuals of Hellenic descent. This ruling group is usually identified with the local elite of Roman Egypt[11]. Members of the

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[7] For a general overview of the social and administrative framework of Roman Egypt see A. K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642: from Alexander to the Arab conquest*, London 1986, p. 67; on the administrative establishment of the early imperial period see L. Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: The creation of a Roman province*, New York-London 2005. On the large number of villages see Diodorus Siculus 1.31. 6-9, with D. W. Rathbone, *Villages, land and population in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, «Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society», n.s. 36, pp. 103-107.

[8] A. K. Bowman, *The town councils of Roman Egypt*, Toronto 1971.

[9] A. K. Bowman - D. W. Rathbone, *Cities and administration in Roman Egypt*, «Journal of Roman Studies», LXXXII (1992), pp. 108-9, suggested that Alexandria lost its city council in the Ptolemaic period.

[10] Bowman - Rathbone, *Cities and administration* cit.

[11] See S. Bussi, *Le élites locali nella provincia d'Egitto di prima età imperiale*, Milano 2008, and for the third-century AD; Tacoma, op. cit. The label of elite is often attributed to the whole group of 'those of the gymnasium', regardless of whether or not its members held administrative roles. For this interpretation, besides Bowman - Rathbone, *Cities and administration* cit., see also Bussi, *Le élites locali* cit., p. 46, and G. Ruffini, *Genealogy and the Gymnasium*, «BASP» 43 (2006), pp. 71-99. For a different view see P. van Minnen, *Aἱ ἀπὸ γυμνασίου: 'Greek' women and the Greek 'Elite' in the metropoleis of Roman Egypt*, in H. Melaerts - L. Mooren (eds.), «*Le rôle et le statut de la femme en Égypte hellénistique, romaine et Byzantine*», Leuven 2002, pp. 338-339, who does not think that the gymnasial

gymnasium were well identified, from a social as well as administrative point of view, through a rigid system of status declarations called *epikrisis*[12].

Villages also had elites. Here, however, where civic institutions were lacking, they displayed different features from the urban elites. Although forms of self-administration are attested here too, the various village officials did not enjoy the same level of autonomy as the urban magistrates[13].

This paper aims to examine the role and social composition of village elites in the Arsinoite in the first century, and to establish whether and how far they changed as Roman rule consolidated in the second century. Three reasons motivated this choice: the exceptionally large amount of documentary evidence; the special status of the Arsinoite; and the transitional character of the period in question.

The Arsinoite villages, especially those on the desert edge, have preserved for the early Roman period a huge amount of administrative texts which allow us to investigate, at times in great detail, the social stratification of many areas[14]. Such evidence is particularly significant because it provides a unique insight into one of the most Hellenised regions of Egypt, where there was a strong presence of Greek settlers, dated in the transition period from the end of the Ptolemaic kingdom to the beginning of Roman rule[15]. During this time some of the old political and administrative practices were gradually adjusting to the new procedures introduced by the Romans, while others were being replaced altogether[16].

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group constituted an elite.

[12] C. A. Nelson, *Status declarations in Roman Egypt*, Amsterdam 1979; S. Bussi, *Selezione di élites nell'Egitto romano. Ἐπίκρισις ed εἴσκρισις tra I e III secolo d.C.*, «Laverna» 14 (2003), pp. 146-166.

[13] The degree of autonomy of village institutions in the Roman and later periods is discussed in M. Langellotti - D. W. Rathbone (eds.), *Village institutions in Egypt from Roman to early Arab rule*, Oxford (forthcoming).

[14] R. S. Bagnall, *The people of the Roman Fayum*, in M. L. Berbrier (ed.), «*Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*», London 1997, pp. 10-11, has noted that while we have plenty of information about the villages on the district edge, we have almost no data for the internal ones.

[15] See, for example, O. Montevecchi, *Problemi di un'epoca di transizione. La grecità d'Egitto tra il I^a e il I^p*, in «*Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses*», Stuttgart - Leipzig 1997, pp. 719-726 (= Scripta selecta, Milano 1998, pp. 391-400)

[16] See most recently Capponi, op. cit., and A. Monson, *From the Ptolemies to the Romans: Political and Economic Change in Egypt*, Cambridge 2012.

2. The nature of village elites

In order to understand the nature of village elites in the early Roman Arsinoite, one must first consider those phenomena which contributed to the creation of such groups in the Ptolemaic period: the arrival of the Greek settlers at the end of the fourth century BC, their interaction with the local population, and finally the attitude of the Ptolemaic rulers towards the established local priestly elites[17]. As opposed to the trend attested in the other Hellenistic kingdoms, in Egypt the establishment of Ptolemaic rule did not mean importation (or creation) of city-state institutions[18]. As seen earlier, here the number of *poleis* was limited to three for the whole Ptolemaic period. The priestly elites, who had traditionally represented the royal power, were maintained as representatives of Ptolemaic rule and, later on, also of Roman rule. As recently argued by Clancier, Coloru and Gorre, the king did not have any interest in creating new *poleis*, as he had more authority over temples than a Hellenistic ruler would have had over a *polis*[19]. The absence of city-states and the preservation of priestly elites did not translate, however, into a lack of control over the Egyptian territory; the Ptolemaic rulers adapted to and used to their advantage the existent socio-political establishment, and devised new ways to assert their authority. In Middle Egypt, for example, the Ptolemies could rely on the representation of a large number of military Greek settlers (especially in the Arsinoite), who promoted a process of Hellenisation among the Egyptian population[20].

In the Roman period the priestly elites appear to have maintained much of their traditional socio-economic power, including some fiscal privileges,

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[17] There is a large bibliography on these questions. See, for example, O. Montevecchi, *Egiziani e Greci: la coesistenza delle due culture nell'Egitto romano*, in «*Egitto e società antica. Atti del Convegno*», Torino, 8/9 VI - 23/24 XI 1984 (Centro di cultura e studi «G. Toniolo» - Amici Università Cattolica), Milano 1985, pp. 233-245; W. Clarysse, *Greeks and Egyptians in the Ptolemaic army and administration*, «Aegyptus» LXV (1985), pp. 57-66; and more recently C. Fischer-Bovet, *Army and society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, Cambridge 2014.

[18] P. Clancier - O. Coloru - G. Gorre, *Les mondes hellénistiques. Du Nil à l'Indu*, Hachette 2017, pp. 179-80.

[19] Clancier - Coloru - Gorre, op. cit., p. 180.

[20] Clancier - Coloru - Gorre, op. cit., p. 189.

such as the exemption from the poll-tax (*laographia*), despite the imposition of a stricter administrative control in the first and second century AD[21]. Next to the priestly elites we find, in urban context, the newly created gymnasial group.

Village elites in Roman Egypt are generally recognised to have included wealthy landowners of Hellenic descent who were officially resident in one of the *poleis* or metropoleis, but spent part of their time in their countryside residences. This was the elite identified by Daniele Foraboschi in the village of Tebtunis, located in the south-west of the Arsinoite nome, in the Polemon *meris*, in the second century AD: rich landowners with typically Macedonian names (such as Herakleides), inhabitants of the district capital, Ptolemais Euergetis, who mainly acted as lessors of private land and money-lenders[22]. Opposed to such group was a wider social stratum, made up of small landowners with typically Egyptian names, who acted, instead, as land lessees and debtors.

The type of village elite as described by Foraboschi, however, does not seem to have reflected the situation in the first century. For this period the papyrological evidence allows us to identify in Tebtunis a more complex and diversified social stratification, which was composed by individuals belonging to various socio-economic statuses, whose inclusion in clearly defined social categories is problematic. Here the boundaries between different groups are often blurred, as can also be seen in the case of the ethnic origin of their members[23].

In the first half of the first century, in particular, a certain number of families of Hellenic descent still lived in the village on a permanent basis. It is only towards the end of the century, with the disappearance of village gymnasia and the creation of an official gymnasial order in the metropoleis, that members of these families were forced to move to Ptolemais Euergetis so

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[21] L. Capponi, *Priests in Augustan Egypt*, in J. H. Richardson - F. Santangelo (eds.) «*Priests and State in the Roman World*», Stuttgart 2011, pp. 507-28; Monson, op. cit., pp. 212-218. See also Bussi, *Le élites locali* cit., pp. 32-34.

[22] D. Foraboschi, *L'archivio di Kronion*, Milano 1971, and R. S. Bagnall, *Village and urban elites in Roman Tebtunis*, Lecture delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, 1999 http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/Papyri/bagnall.html

[23] See, for example, R. S. Bagnall, *The people of the Roman Fayum* cit., and J. Rowlandson, *Gender and Cultural Identity in Roman Egypt*, in F. McHardy - E. Marshall (eds.), «*Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*», London 2004, pp. 151-166.

as to be enrolled in the newly established group. Although the privileges of the gymnasial class are not entirely clear, it appears that its members enjoyed the payment of the poll-tax at a reduced rate and a high degree of social prestige, which derived mostly from the fact that, in the name of their Hellenic origin, they were officially recognised by the Roman government as a group separate from the rest of the population[24].

Even then, these people lived partly in the village, partly in the metropolis[25]. In order to define the nature of the village elites of this period, it is, therefore, necessary to adopt clear criteria which take into account the political scenario of the time and reflect, at least partially, the parameters which have been established for the definition of the urban elites.

These criteria include wealth (e.g. large availability of cash, and ownership of houses, land, and slaves); a high social status, which could be attained mainly by participating in the local administration (or by having connections with high administrative officials); and a high level of literacy and education[26].

In what follows these criteria are applied to the study of the evidence from first-century Tebtunis and Philadelphia, with a particular focus on the former. Both villages were Ptolemaic foundations, which have produced an exceptionally high number of documentary papyri for the Roman period[27].

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[24] Monson, op. cit., pp. 267-68; Y. Broux, *Creating a new local elite: The establishment of the metropolitan orders of Roman Egypt*, «APF*»* LIX/1 (2013), pp. 142-152. A re-examination of the nature and privileges of the gymnasial group is currently being conducted by Dominic Rathbone.

[25] An example is the family of the descendants of Patron (also known as the family of Laches). See W. S. Bagnall, *The archive of Laches: Prosperous farmers of the Fayum in the second century*, Duke Unpublished Dissertation 1973; W. Clarysse and C. Gallazzi, *Archivio dei discendenti di Laches o dei discendenti di Patron?*, «Ancient Society*»* XXIV (1993), pp. 63-68.

[26] Ober, op. cit., pp. 11-12, noted that the criteria used to define modern elites mirror Aristotle's list of the elite's main attributes, minus the category of moral value (*arete*): wealth, high birth and cultural education (*Pol.* 1291b14-30).

[27] On Tebtunis see, in particular, J. Keenan, *Deserted villages: From the ancient to the Medieval Fayyum*, «BASP» XL (2003), pp. 119-139; W. Clarysse, *Tebtynis and Soknopaiou Nesos: The papyrological documentation through centuries*, in S. Lippert - M. Schentuleit (eds.) «*Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos: Leben im römerzeitlichen Fajum. Akten des Internationalen Symposions vom 11. bis 13. Dezember 2003*», Würzburg 2005, pp. 19-27. On Philadelphia see J. F. Oates, *Philadelphia in the Fayum during the Roman Empire*, in «*Atti dell'XI Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*», Milan 1966, pp. 451-474; A. E. Hanson,

Of similar size (50 ha.), they also might have had similar population size[28]. The estimated population for first-century Philadelphia is 3,300 inhabitants, based on the tax-registers dated to the reigns of Claudius (AD 41-54) and Nero (AD 54-68)[29]. For Tebtunis we have no quantifiable data, but the proposed guesstimates range between 3,000 and 8,000 inhabitants[30]. From an archaeological point of view, while the ancient site of Tebtunis is relatively well preserved, of Philadelphia there is not much to see[31]. For the mid-first century AD for both villages we can rely on coherent groups of documents which shed light on social stratification: the record-office archive of Kronion from Tebtunis and the Nemesion archive of Philadelphia. The record-office archive, also known as the *grapheion* archive, includes documents, mainly contracts, which were produced at the local notary office, and takes its name after the man who managed the office for thirty years (AD 26-56), Kronion son of Apion[32]. The Nemesion archive includes documents belonging to the tax-office, mostly dated between AD 47/8 and 57/8, and takes its name after the collector of the poll-tax of those years, Nemesion son of Zoilos[33]. These two contemporary archives permit us to form a fairly good idea about the nature of the local elites of Tebtunis and Philadelphia during the Julio-Claudian period.

Documents from Philadelphia drawn from the census register, in «*Actes du XVe Congrès International de Papyrologie*», Bruxelles 1979, pp. 60-74.

[28] A. K. Bowman, *Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt: Population and Settlement*, in A. K. Bowman - A. Wilson, «*Settlement, Urbanization and Population*», Oxford 2011, p. 337 (Table 11.4).

[29] A. E. Hanson, *The Keeping of Records at Philadelphia in the Julio-Claudian Period and the "Economic Crisis under Nero"*, in «*Proceedings of the XVIIIth Congress of Papyrology*», Athens 1988, Vol. II, pp. 261-277.

[30] J. Rowlandson, *Agricultural tenancy and village society in Roman Egypt*, in A. K. Bowman and E. Rogan (eds.) «*Agriculture in Egypt from Pharaonic to Modern Times*», Oxford 1999, p. 147 n. 31; O. Montevecchi - M. M. Masciadri, *Contratti di baliatico e vendite fiduciarie a Tebtynis*, «Aegyptus» LXII (1982), p. 153.

[31] Since 1988 Tebtunis has been excavated by a joint team of the University of Milan and the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO).

[32] See E. Husselman, *Procedures of the record office of Tebtynis in the First Century A.D.*, in «*Proceedings of the XIIth International Congress Papyrology*», Toronto 1970, pp. 223-238; M. Langellotti, *Contracts and people in early Roman Tebtunis: A complex affair*, in «*Proceedings of the XXVIIth Congress of Papyrology*», Warsaw 2016, pp. 1725-1736.

[33] See, in particular, A. E. Hanson, *The keeping of records at Philadelphia* cit., 1988.

For Tebtunis, particularly valuable evidence is provided by three registers which list the contracts recorded at the *grapheion*, day-by-day, in five four-month periods during the reign of Claudius: *P.Mich.* II 121 verso, from the end of April to the end of August 42; *P.Mich.* II 123 recto, from September 45 to August 46; and *P.Mich.* V 238, from September to December 46.

Each contract is indicated in one line, including the day and month in which the relevant document has been registered, the names of the contracting parties, and the object[34].

The large majority of the contracting parties were from Tebtunis, while only a small number were from nearby villages, namely Talei, Kerkeesis, Ibion and Kaine[35]. The total number of named individuals in the three registers is 2,370[36]. If we include the various associations and groups, and contracting parties identified as relatives (mainly wife) and 'other' (ἄλλος), the total number goes up to 3,030. An analysis of the name types reveals that those who bear a Macedonian name, including Herakleides and Lusimachos, make up 5% of the total of 2,370 named individuals, while those with a priestly name, that is a name associated with the priests of Soknebtunis, including Onnophris, Marepsemis, and Marsisouchos, constitute 7.8%[37]. Both groups appear to have played a distinctive role in the society and economy of Tebtunis.

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[34] In two of the three registers, *P.Mich.* II 123 recto and V 238, each transaction also includes the sum of the payment of the scribal fee (*grammatikon*). U. Yiftach-Firanko, *The grammatikon: some considerations on the feeing policies of legal documents in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods*, in D. M. Kehoe, D. Ratzan, U. Yiftach-Firanko (eds.), «*Law and transaction costs in the ancient economy*», Ann Arbor 2015, pp. 145-161.

[35] *P.Mich.* II 123 recto V 28 (Talei, 17 October 45); II 123 recto VIII 32 (Kaine, 12 December 45); II 123 recto XI 28 (Talei, 17 January 46); II 123 recto XVI 6 (Talei, 21 May 46); II 123 recto XXI 10 (Aruokomes, 30 July 46); II 123 recto XXII 27 (Ibion Eikosipentarouron, 7 August 46); II 123 recto XXII 10 (Kerkeesis, 17-20 August 46). One of the contracting parties is from a village in the Herakleopolite, Phenameni; cf. *P.Mich.* II 121 recto IV i = verso III 8 (21 June 42).

[36] These calculations are based on a study on early Roman Tebtunis which I am currently completing and which will result in a monograph.

[37] For a list of common Greek and Macedonian names see Bagnall, *The people of the Roman Fayum* cit., pp. 14-19. The names of the priests of Soknebtunis are included in the following lists: *P.Mich*. V 233 (AD 25), 226 (AD 37), 342 (AD 41 or 42), *P.Tebt*. II 299 (c. AD 50), 296 (AD 123), 294 (AD 46), 298 (AD 107/8), 296-97 (AD 123), 300 (AD 151), 293 (c. AD 187), 292 (AD 189/90), 301 (AD 190), 295 (AD 126-138), 303 (AD 176-80), 304 (AD 176-80).

The ones with Macedonian names mostly appear in loan contracts of various types (e.g. regular loan, *daneion*, and deposit, *paratheke*), and in the majority of cases as creditors (82%). Conversely, individuals bearing priestly names occur most often in leases of public land, mainly as sub-lessors, sometimes with the title of elders of the public tenants (*presbuteroi demosion georgon*)[38]. These are also attested in a fair number of cash loans (22%), but in this case they act mainly as debtors. Money-lenders, on the other hand, are in a very small number, and among them only a certain Marsisouchos appears to have disposed of large availability of cash (560 dr.)[39].

It is within these two groups that we must look for members of the local elite[40]. Since wealth is one of the main qualifying requirements, a useful way to identify them is to look at those who lent large sums of cash. The highest sums go from 540 to 2,040 drachmae, for which money-lenders are two individuals, both named Lusimachos, one Herakleides, Herakles, Marsisouchos and Orsenouphis[41]. Overall, individuals with Greek and Macedonian names outnumber those with Egyptian names in loan contracts dealing with large sums of money. The second qualifying requirement to be deemed a member of the elite is involvement in the local administration. The three registers of contracts provide information only about the priests (and more generally about individuals with typically Egyptian names), but not about contracting parties bearing Macedonian names. The only exception is the village scribe, Lusas, son of Lusimachos, who belonged to a family of Greek descent, well-known in Tebtunis, to which I will come back shortly[42].

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[38] The most comprehensive study on the elders is still A. Tomsin, *Étude sur les πρεσβύτεροι des villages de la χώρα égyptienne*, Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, Bruxelles 38, 1952: première partie 95-130 et deuxième partie 467-532. See now S. Strassi, *Elders of the public farmers and village elders in Roman Egypt: the cases of Bakchias and Karanis*, and T. Kruse, *The organisation of the state farmers in village administration in Roman Egypt,* in Langellotti - Rathbone, op. cit. (forthcoming).

[39] *P.Mich.* V 238 III 155.

[40] The remainder of the contracting parties, who constituted the overwhelming majority, is made up of individuals bearing both Egyptian and Greek names. The analysis of the transactions in which they were involved has revealed different economic patterns from what we have seen for the individuals with Macedonian and priestly names. The results of this investigation are discussed in detail in my forthcoming study on early Roman Tebtunis.

[41] 540 dr.: *P.Mich*. II 121 verso II 8 = recto II iv; 2,040 dr.: *P.Mich.* V 238 II 94 = 124 V 14.

[42] *P.Mich.* II 123 recto XX 26-7; XXI 30.

The priests of Soknebtunis appear to have held a central role within the local community as they were responsible for the management of public land in and around the village. They constituted a privileged group of fifty individuals who were exempt from the poll-tax[43]. Although we have no definite data about the amount of public land at Tebtunis, contemporary evidence shows that in the Arsinoite nome the proportion of public land was higher than what is attested for the Nile Valley[44]. In Tebtunis in particular, the majority of the transactions listed in the AD 40's registers seem to have dealt with public land. This attests to the central role the priesthood played within the local community as managers of public land, an asset associated with the main economic activity of the village, agriculture.

Administrative roles, such as those of village scribe, tax-collectors, managers of public land (usually village elders), head of the record-office, were held also by less well-off individuals, of both Greek and Egyptian descent. Within this category we find, for example, the above mentioned village scribe, Lusas, and Kronion, lessee of the record-office and head notary. Whether such individuals could be regarded as part of the elite it is not entirely clear. In order to ascertain this fact, it is necessary to look at their socio-economic status more closely. Lusas belonged to the family of Lusimachos, son of Didumos, for which we have eight documents dated between AD 27 and 47[45]. Ownership of catoecic land, which, as seen earlier, was (mostly) a prerogative of the descendants of the Greek settlers, and a Macedonian onomastics confirm that this family was of Hellenic descent. In this period, however, the family of Lusimachos seems to have gone through some financial difficulties. Due to various debts, the three sons were forced to mortgage their landed property, for a total of 82 arourae. Two members of this family are attested in the role of village scribe: Didumos the elder, in AD 41-2, and again Lusas, in AD 46[46].

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[43] Monson, op. cit., pp. 212-236, on the role of priests in the Ptolemaic and early Roman period.

[44] Monson, op. cit., p. 97 (fig. 3.4); J. Rowlandson, *The organization of public land in Roman Egypt*, in J. C. Moreno Garcia (ed.), «*L'agriculture institutionelle en Egypte ancienne: etat de la question et perspectives interdisciplinaires*», Villeneuve d'Ascq 2006, pp. 177-178.

[45] *P.Mich.* V 336 (AD 27); 278-79 (first century); 232 (AD 36); 262 (AD 35-6); 266 (AD 38); 267-68 (AD 41-2); 340 (AD 45-6); 341 (AD 47).

[46] Didumos the elder: *P.Mich.* V 267-68. Lusas: *P.Mich*. II 123 recto XX 26-27; XXI 30.

According to Verhoogt, in the Roman period involvement in the administration was an essential requirement for social advancement, enabling various local officials to establish contacts with high administrators and acquire further visibility in the eyes of the Romans (thus gaining in influence and social prestige)[47]. These reasons would have contributed to the creation of new social dynamics and power relations, whereby wealthy families sought to establish a link with local administrators. Marriage was the obvious way to create such a link. It is within this contest that marriages between members of the family of Lusimachos son of Didumos and members of another family of Hellenic descent, that of Herakleides the younger son of Maron, can be explained. The reference here is to the marriage between Arsinoe, daughter of Herakleides, with Lusimachos son of Lusimachos, and the one between Herakleia, niece of Herakleides, with Haruotes, another son of Lusimachos[48]. As will be discussed later in more detail, the family of Herakleides the younger no doubt belonged to the financial elite of the village. One might, therefore, wonder why members of this family would want to establish marriage relations with a family that was in clear economic distress. Verhoogt interpreted these marriages as an attempt on the part of the Herakleides the younger's family to acquire social prestige by making connections with a family who was actively involved in the local administration. In fact, such relations were not useful only to the family of Herakleides, but also to the family of Lusimachos, who could profit from economic favours (e.g. cash loans).

The case of Kronion son of Apion, head of the record-office of Tebtunis, was in several ways different from that of Lusas. We do not know much about Kronion's personal life, but his membership in one of the local associations (of Harpokrates) and the fact that he could write both in Greek and demotic suggests that he was strongly integrated into the culture of the village[49]. As head notary, Kronion had frequent relations with metropolitan officials (although not, as far as we know, with Alexandrian officials), and the available evidence confirms that he was particularly well-off by village standard. Two accounts, in particular, reveals that he spent an average of 67 drachmae per month for

[47] A. Verhoogt, *Family relations in early Roman Tebtunis*, «PalArch» III (2004), pp. 22-24.

[48] *P.Mich.* V 350 (AD 37); *P.Mich.* V 340 (AD 45-46) = *P.Mich*. II 121 verso XII 3-4.

[49] On payments concerning the association of the god*: P.Mich.* II 127 I 20, 30; II 13, 33. On demotic writing: *P.Mich.* II 123 verso V 28.

his private expenses, and about 40 drachmae per month for the running of the record-office[50]. To provide further context, Dominic Rathbone has noted that salaries for non-specialised agricultural work attested in the first and second centuries varied between 3 to 6 ob., that is 30 drachmae per month. When we compare this figure with the amount of about 60 drachmae which Kronion spent for his family, it becomes clear that his socio-economic status was far above that of a common villager[51].

Kronion's case seems to be comparable with that of Nemesion son of Zoilos, collector of the poll-tax in Philadelphia several times between AD 44/45 and 57/8. According to Hanson, Nemesion was a member of a new local elite which was taking shape in the early Roman period, made up of influential and well-off individuals, whose economic and political power was determined by their association with the new Roman government via administrative roles and contacts with high rank officials[52]. During his office, Nemesion collaborated closely with another important local official, Herakleides the village scribe (*komogrammateus*). As a villager, he was a taxpayer himself, but occasionally he appears to have been exempt from the payment of some capitation taxes[53]. Nemesion was also a businessman, landowner and money-lender, who established frequent relations with higher officials, such as the *strategos*[54]. Occasionally, with the *strategos*' permission, he also made use of armed bodyguards, which has been interpreted as a sign of social prestige.[55]

The elite identified by Hanson in Philadelphia, mostly Hellenised and which promoted an active integration into the Roman government, was different from the elite attested in less Hellenised villages, such as Soknopaiou Nesos, located on the northern shore of the Lake Moeris, in the Arsinoite nome.

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[50] *P.Mich.* II 123 recto I and verso II-XXII; *P.Mich*. II 127.

[51] D. W. Rathbone, *Village markets in Roman Egypt: the case of first-century AD Tebtunis*, in M. Frass (ed.) «*Kauf - Konsum und Märkte. Wirtschaftswelten im Fokus - Von der römischen Antike bis zur Gegenwart*», Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 126-27.

[52] Hanson, *Egyptians, Greeks, Romans* cit., p. 134: «money and power characterized the village elite at Philadelphia and their acquisitive habits awakened in them a degree of sympathy for their new Roman masters, as providing an atmosphere in which their own agricultural efforts and their money-lending flourished».

[53] Hanson, *Egyptians, Greeks, Romans* cit., p. 135 n. 8.

[54] See, for example, SB XIV 11585 (AD 59).

[55] SB IV 7461 (AD 45).

Dominated by the temple of Soknopaios, the local version of the crocodile god Sobek, this village had no agricultural land, and due to its geographical position between the lake and the eastern desert, its inhabitants were mostly camel- and donkey-drivers, and fishermen[56]. On the basis of an onomastic study, Deborah Samuel [Hobson] calculated that 95% of the population in Soknopaiou Nesos was made up of people of Egyptian origin[57]. Here the elite was mainly composed of some wealthy priests[58].

Membership of individuals like Kronion and Nemesion, or even Lusas, in what we define elite remains problematic. They were certainly well-off, but do not seem to have disposed of the same financial resources of wealthy individuals, such as Herakleides the younger. From this point of view, they did not fulfill the main requirement for membership in the elite, that is wealth, although they were involved in the local administration and had connections with metropolitan officials.

In order to have a better appreciation of the complexities of village social stratification in the early Roman Arsinoite, one must adopt stricter criteria and thus regard individuals like Kronion, Nemesion and Lusas as members of what we might call 'sub-elite'. As suggested by Hanson, the creation of such group was a result of the new administrative system put in place by the Romans, whereby well-off villagers could attain better socio-economic conditions by holding local posts (e.g. tax-collectors and notaries). To some extent, it appears that the Roman policy of promoting the creation of a self-regulating administration was applied not only in cities and metropoleis (e.g. gymnasial group), but also in the large Hellenised villages of the countryside (*chora*), like Tebtunis and Philadelphia.

Self-representation also sheds some light on the nature of village elites. In the Roman period status designations, as we find them in urban contexts, are not documented for villagers. In cities and metropoleis we find two main labels: *metropolitai* and 'those of the gymnasium'. In the Arsinoite nome the

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[56] D. Hobson, *Agricultural land and economic life in Soknopaiou Nesos*, «BASP» XXI (1984), pp. 89-109

[57] D. H. Samuel, *Greeks and Romans at Soknopaiou Nesos*, in «*Proceedings of the XVIth International Congress of Papyrology*», Chico 1981, pp. 389-403.

[58] On the importance of the demotic evidence from this village see S. Lippert, *Seeing the whole picture: Why reading Greek texts from Soknopaiou Nesos is not enough*, in «*Proceedings of the XXVth Congress of Papyrology*», Ann Arbor 2010, pp. 427-434.

latter were called 'the 6,475 *katoikoi*' (or Greek settlers)[59]. To these broad categories we must add the titles of the various magistracies and other civic posts, such as gymnasiarch, *kosmetes*, and *exegetes*. In villages the social and political scenario is of course different. A common designation here is *apolusimos*, 'exempt', which refers to the exemption from the payment of some taxes. This was the case of the fifty priests of Soknebtunis in Tebtunis, who were exempt from the poll-tax and clearly part of the local elite. Not all the ones bearing the title of *apolusimoi*, however, were members of the elite. The farmers of the imperial estates of Claudius in the same village, for example, were said to have been exempt, but most likely from liturgies and only for a limited period of time[60]. They were common villagers, who in some cases might have been well-off, but they certainly did not belong to the elite.

Status designations associated with individuals of Hellenic descent, on the other hand, are very rare in villages. In mid-first century Tebtunis the title of 'Macedonian of the catoecic cavalry' (or of the catoeci) is attested only in four cessions of catoecic land in reference to the ceding party[61]. This appears to have been the latest attestation of a Hellenic status designation referred to someone living in a village. It is likely that the reason behind this lies in the creation of the new urban privileged groups, which in this early period of the Roman domination in Egypt were probably still in the making and which eventually forced individuals who could claim a Greek descent to move to the district capital. While the title of *apolusimoi* usually serves to mark the tax exemption status of priests under Roman rule, the ethnic designation of 'Macedonian' does not seem to have carried any particular fiscal privilege with it. It was most likely only a relic of the old Ptolemaic system, which some individuals still used to distinguish themselves from the local population, as a sign of social prestige[62].

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[59] D. Canducci, *I 6475 cateci greci dell'Arsinoite*, «Aegyptus» LXX (1990), pp. 211-55, and *I 6475 categi greci dell'Arsinoite. Prosopografia*, «Aegyptus» LXXI (1991), pp. 121-216.

[60] *P.Mich*. V 244 (AD 43). On this association see M. Langellotti, *Professional associations and the State: The case of first-century Tebtunis*, «Chron. d'Ég.» XCI fasc. 181, pp. 111-134.

[61] *P.Mich.* V 259 (AD 33); 267 (AD 41-2?); 273 (AD 46); 303 (AD I).

[62] A comparable case is the village of Eukarpia, in Phrygia. P. Thonemann, *Phrygia: an anarchist history, 950 BC-AD 100*, in P. Thonemann (ed.), «*Roman Phrygia. Culture and society*», Cambridge 2013, p. 24, has noted that in this village in the Roman imperial period two members of the local elite defined themselves as *klerouchoi* and *triakontarchai*: «Although both titles [...] had surely lost most of their substantive content by the second or third century AD, they nonetheless survived at Eukarpia as means of distinguishing the uppermost stratum

Who belonged to the village elite then? By abiding closely by the requirements set earlier, the village elite was made up only of a limited number of individuals of Hellenic descent and of a few wealthy priests. The first were the financial elite, holding the economic power within the community and acting as money-lenders for the ones in need. Although they do not seem to have held official administrative positions in the village, we have evidence showing that, at least in some cases, they tried to make connections with those who did (through marriages, for example). It is also possible that they held administrative positions in the nome capital, although how far this would make them 'elite' of a village is unclear.

Wealthy priests constituted the administrative elite, managing public land, one of the most important economic assets of village communities in Roman Egypt.

We do not know the identity of all members of the elite in any given village, but for Tebtunis the surviving evidence provides us with valuable information about certain families and individuals. Among those of Hellenic descent is the family of Herakleides the younger, which is attested for a period of about ten years between AD 37 and 48[63]. Herakleides the younger, son of Maron, and his wife Ptolema, daughter of Herodes, had seven children (five men and two women), and their descendants can be identified in some second-century documents, as both landowners and creditors. In this period the family lived in the village of Tebtunis on a permanent (or at least semi-permanent) basis. This is shown, for example, by the marriages of some members with individuals who were permanent resident of the village. I am referring here to three marriages: the one between Arsinoe, daughter of Herakleides, with Lusimachos, son of Lusimachos; the one between Herakleia, niece of Herakleides, with Haruotes, son of Lusimachos; and the one between Herodes, another son of Herakleides, with a certain Apias, daughter of Socrates[64]. Herodes and Apias got married around the AD 22, when the two registered an alimentary contract at the local record-office (a typical Egyptian legal instrument used for the settlement of the spouses' properties after marriage). Apias most likely belonged to a quite

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of the local land-owning elite».

[63] *P.Mich.* V 350 (AD 37), XI 621 (AD 37), V 266 (AD 38), PSI VIII 918 (38-39), *P.Mich.* V 276 (AD 47), V 326 (AD 48), V 353 (AD 48), V 297 (undated).

[64] *P.Mich.* II 121 verso III 14 (= recto IV vii). The identification of Herodes of Lusimachos with Herodes who marries Apias in AD 22 seems to be confirmed by both patronymic and age.

well off Graeco-Egyptian family: her dowry included 560 drachmae and 14 arourae of catoecic land (plus paraphernalia), and in AD 42 she lent her husband 700 drachmae[65]. The combined Greek-Egyptian culture is also visible in the onomastics: Apias' name is linked with the Egyptian Apis bull; her brother's name, Petesouchos, is associated with the crocodile god, Sobek ('gift of Souchos').

As for the marriage between Herakleia and Haruotes, it is interesting to note that this was registered through both Egyptian and Greek documents, which suggests that these families were integrated into local traditions and practices[66].

In a census declaration dated to AD 103, a certain Didumos son of Herakleides alias Lourios is attested as one of the 6,475 *katoikoi* of the Arsinoite, resident in Ptolemais Euergetis[67]. From some documents belonging to the archive of the farmer Kronion son of Cheos, dated to the second century AD, we learn that Herakleides Lourios had three sons, one of whom, Lusimachos Loupos, had three children[68]. The three of them appear as creditors of the family of Kronion the farmer[69]. In particular, Heron held important civic magistracies, that of gymnasiarch and that of *kosmetes*[70]. At this stage it is clear that the family had moved to the district capital and was living there on a more or less permanent basis, though still engaging in business in Tebtunis (land leasing and money lending).

Among the most affluent priests of Soknebtunis, we must mention the family of Psuphis alias Harpokration, son of Serapion. The association of this family with the priests of Soknebtunis is confirmed not only by the names of their members (Psuphis, Onnophris, Psenkebkis), but also by the role of president of the association of the priests of Kronos held by Psuphis son of Onnophris, grandson of Psuphis[71]. The family is attested in seven documents spanning in time from AD 26 to 51[72]. The bulk of the information is to be found in a division of property dated to AD 46, in which Psuphis and his wife Tetosiris divide their property among their four children and two grandsons: land,

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[65] *P.Mich.* II 121 recto IV vii 3.

[66] *P.Mich.* V 340 cols. I-II. The two contracts are also attested in *P.Mich*. II 121 verso XII 3-4

[67] *P.Mich*. XV 693.

[68] Foraboschi, op. cit.

[69] Foraboschi, op. cit., p. XXX.

[70] *P.Kron*. 35.

[71] *P.Mich.* V 322b (AD 51).

[72] *P.Mich.* V, intr.

including several arouras of catoeic land, five houses, three slaves, animals, and possessions of various kind[73]. The possession of catoecic land, usually reserved to the descendants of the Greek settlers, within an Egyptian priestly family opens the question of acquisition. The simplest explanation lies in a potential mixed marriage. It is very likely, in other words, that Tetosiris, who in the division of property appears as the owner of catoecic land, belonged to a family of Greek descent and had received this plot as part of her dowry. Another possibility is that the land was purchased through a regular contract of sale, thus confirming the existence of an increasingly open market of private land under the Romans[74].

It is also worth nothing that the children of both Herakleides the younger and Psuphis could write in Greek. In general, in Roman Egypt a connection between wealth and literacy seems to be established with a certain degree of certainty.

3. Conclusions

In the early Roman Arsinoite two main types of elites can be identified in the various villages: local priestly elites (administrative power) and wealthy individuals of Hellenic descent (economic power). In some villages, where Hellenisation was not strong, like Soknopaiou Nesos, we find only a priestly elite. In other villages, where the number of individuals and families of Hellenic descent was particularly high, like Philadelphia and Tebtunis, both types of elites are attested.

Priestly elites were a relic of the Ptolemaic policy of employing Egyptian priests in the royal administration. Despite the establishment of several official measures, which in some ways changed their role in the first two centuries of Roman rule, they managed to maintain their economic power and privileges, as attested in the case of Tebtunis.

The nature of village elites in the mid-first century AD was determined by the existence of frequent relations and exchanges between different cultures and traditions, as shown, for example, by mixed marriages at Tebtunis. The use of Egyptian legal instruments also confirms that this elite was integrated in the local culture. The presence of a Hellenic elite seems to have been associated with population size and the level of Hellenisation. In large villages, such as

[73] *P.Mich.* V 322a.

[74] See, for example, Monson, op. cit., p. 211.

Philadelphia and Tebtunis, the connection between elite, population size, and Hellenisation is not difficult to observe. Both Philadelphia and Tebtunis had a population comparable to some small cities in other eastern provinces, like Blaundos and Kyaneai in Phrygia, which, in the Roman period, had a total population of town and territory of, respectively, 5,000 and 6,200[75]. In the two Arsinoite villages the spread of Greek culture in the early Roman period is attested in the reasonably large number of Hellenic families and is also visible in the onomastics, whereby Greek-type names were becoming more and more popular[76]. Overall, Hellenisation spread out in large villages surrounded by a large amount of agricultural land, which constituted the main source of income for the Hellenic elite.

It is worth noting that Hellenisation was uneven, in Egypt like in the rest of the eastern Mediterranean, and local traditions played a pivotal role in determining the shaping of social stratification, and hence of the elite.

The nature of these village elites changed in the turn of the mid-first century, with the disappearance of the Greek gymnasia in villages and the creation of urban privileged groups, which resulted in a partial abandonment of the villages. Many individuals of Greek descent kept living half time in villages and half time in the district capital, but their moving to the metropolis contributed to a reshaping of the local society as a whole. Village elites, as we knew them in earlier periods, seem to have disappeared gradually, and their Hellenic element decreased. This was, in part, the result of the imposition, on behalf of the Romans, of a stronger administrative control over the entire population, exemplified by the status declarations for enrolment in privileged groups and also visible in the increased control over other social and economic institutions, such as the professional associations[77].

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[75] Thonemann cit., p. 34.

[76] On the importance of onomastics as index of local culture see Bagnall, *The people of the Roman Fayum* cit., and Rowlandson, *Gender and Cultural Identity in Roman Egypt* cit.

[77] Langellotti, *Professional associations and the state* cit., p. 128, and M. C. D. Paganini, *Private associations and village life in early Roman Egypt*, in Langellotti - Rathbone (eds.), «*Village institutions*» cit. (forthcoming).